



Hang on for the Ride!

Dear friends, Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!

I'm Pastor Laurie Skow-Anderson. I serve as the Bishop of the NWSWI. Today is the Sunday after Easter. It has been over a month since many of us have worshiped together inside our church buildings. The novelty of worshiping online has worn off. This is a difficult time. We isolated, staying safe at home, we are learning to be and do God's work in new ways, staying home to stop the spread of the coronavirus. It sounds strange to say, but staying home is how we love our neighbors as ourselves these days.

As Bishop of the NWSWI I am grateful for your partnership in ministry as we continue to do God's work with our hands even though we can't be together in the same place. The hungry are still be fed, the Bible camps are still gearing up for summer camp, campus pastors are staying in touch with college students, Lutheran Disaster Response is still finding ways to help those who survived the recent tornado in Nashville, LWR is still distributing the quilts you made around the world, LSS, WELCA, Seminary students are studying for their finals, congregational call committees are still interviewing pastoral candidates, we continue to pray and support our global companions in Malawi, and together we are still sharing the good news so that the next generation will come to know and love Jesus. Thank you for your ongoing partnership in ministry even in these difficult times.

The Gospel reading for the second Sunday of EASTER is from John 20. Today I'll be just looking at the first two verses...don't worry about Thomas this year.... hear this again

John 20:19-20 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the **doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked** for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Can you picture in your mind that scene? 10 disciples in a house, Judas has died and Thomas is MIA, the door is locked and there's Peter, James, John, Phillip, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Matthew, Simon, James, Mary, Salome, Mary Magdalene, and the other women...

The disciples have been on an **emotional roller coaster**. A week ago, they were having a parade celebrating Jesus as the son of David as he rode a donkey into Jerusalem. A couple of days later they are all together in the upper room celebrating the Passover when Jesus

broke the bread and said, "this is my body." And before they knew what had happened Jesus had been condemned to death, hung a cross and died between two criminals. That was Friday at 3:00 pm when the sky turned black, Jesus said it was finished and breathed his last. Talk about a roller coaster ride. That was only Friday and now today, we read in John's gospel that it's Sunday night and the reality of Jesus' death is setting in. Some of the disciples remembered vaguely something about him saying something would happen after three days ...so its Sunday night and the disciples are sitting on the floor, **waiting**; leaning against a wall, **waiting**; talking, replaying the events of the last 72 hours, mulling over in their minds what had happened and **waiting**. They didn't believe Mary's tale about seeing Jesus Sunday morning in the garden. Peter and the other disciple told again how they found the grave empty and the grave clothes folded. But they couldn't wrap their heads around what it meant.

Can you imagine what the room looked like behind that locked door...10 emotionally exhausted men, and women crying, grieving. But they were all just waiting... WAITING....

Like we all are. Waiting for this COVID 19 nightmare to be over...waiting impatiently...waiting fearfully....waiting hopefully....just waiting

Dr. Seuss, one of my favorite theologians writes a great poem about waiting...

In one of his last books, OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO is a poem called the Waiting PLACE. Are any of you familiar with it? I'll read a bit of it...

Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to Great Places! You're off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes You can steer yourself Any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

You can get so confused that you'll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles cross weirdish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.

The Waiting Place... ...for people just waiting. Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow **or the waiting around for a Yes or No** or waiting for their hair to grow.

Everyone is just waiting. Waiting for the fish to bite or waiting for the wind to fly a kite or waiting around for Friday night or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake or a pot to boil, or a Better Break or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants

or a wig with curls, **or Another Chance.**

Everyone is just waiting.

Dr. Seuss tells us that The Waiting Place is a useless place. But we already know that.

Waiting can be horrible, like waiting to get the results back from a test for cancer. Waiting on pins and needles. This is not the happy anticipatory waiting of Advent or the waiting for a baby to be born.

DEAR FRIENDS. WE are all stuck in an unpleasant holding pattern, we are all waiting for things to go back to normal, so we can go back to what we know how to do.

THE WAITING PLACE, a useless place. The disciples must surely have felt stuck, paralyzed by fear, behind locked doors, grief stricken, and completely and totally unprepared to continue Jesus' ministry. In the next chapter of John's gospel, we read that Peter is uncertain what to do next he goes back to doing the only thing he knows how to do, FISH. HE's a Fisherman. Jesus has called him to fish for people. Jesus called him to build his church. Jesus called him to proclaim the good news of God's reign. Peter went back to what he knew how to do.

And so, a locked room full of sad people waited, and not knowing what to do they waited until... Jesus just shows up.

When have you been at your lowest point? Sad, grieving, discouraged, frustrated, angry, disappointed? How did you experience God's presence in those days? How did Jesus show up?

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the **doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked** for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the **disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord**²¹ **Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."** ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven then; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Again imagine the scene, words can't convey the reaction, the emotional roller coaster reaches the height, Jesus came and stood among them and said, PEACE, he showed them his wounds from the nails and sword, and the disciples rejoiced. Rejoiced! Rejoice! I bet it was as loud as the high school gym when the basketball team won the section final. I imagine laughing and shouting, jumping around and fist pumping, hugging and kissing, and high fives. I imagine tears of joy. Not dead! Not dead! Alive!

Then when the noise settled down, Jesus said again...peace be with you.... he breathed on them the Holy Spirit and said...as God has sent me, so you are now being sent to continue the work that I've begun with you. So I send you. The waiting is over. Jesus is telling them what to do next. They are being sent out of the locked room and into the world to do the very thing that got Jesus killed. They are terrified of the Jewish leaders who had Jesus killed because he had the nerve to heal people and forgive their sins. Now Jesus is sending them out with specific instructions to forgive sin. He is sending them out to be martyrs. All of a sudden, waiting

doesn't seem like such a bad thing to do. Staying home and waiting, not so bad when we hear about the folks who get so sick and end up in the intensive care.

Have you ever been on a roller coaster? If you have you'll remember that it climbs slowly up to the top of high point and then seems to pause for a moment or two and you wait for what's coming next...you wait for the roller coaster to plunge down at breakneck speed. Here we are. It's Easter. Jesus is alive. He has risen from the grave and we are on pause...waiting... Here's the deal. We are sent out to share the good news of Jesus, but we are locked up in our own homes for fear of getting sick or making others sick. What does it mean to be SENT today? As Easter people we are called by God and sent out into the world to share the good news of the resurrection and the transforming power of God love that raises the dead and give us all new life in Christ. The amazing opportunity for us all is for us in the season of COVID 19 is to figure out what it means to live a Christian life when we are at home.

This is a health crisis, but it is also an opportunity to learn new ways to be church together, new ways to share the good news about Jesus. Here is the opportunity to use Technology, social media, video conference, the old-fashioned telephone or paper letter in the mailbox at the end of driveway...to share the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead. Be curious to what Jesus is saying to us today. Pay attention to where Jesus is showing up ` So get on the rollercoaster and hang on. Following Jesus will be different now. Just as Jesus unlocked the door to the room and shows up during the disciples darkest moment Jesus shows up during a covid 19 pandemic... Jesus unlocks our hearts to love Jesus unlocks our imaginations Jesus unlocks our minds Jesus gives us courage and sends us out in new creative ways, for the sake of the world.

Our Gospel reading ends with the answer to the WHY question. Why is this story so important that you and I are sent out to share it with those who can't wait to hear it?

John 20:31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. AMEN